During his lifetime, Idries Shah published many hundreds of stories, drawn from the rich cultural heritage of Eastern lands. A great many of Shah's tales have their roots in his own homeland, Afghanistan. As with great stories, they work on many levels — entertaining the listener, while imparting a teaching message, an element that is in itself of profound value.
Shah used to say that a well-crafted tale is like a peach. Refreshing and tantalising to the senses, the delicious flesh is why we regard peaches so highly. But it is the stone that lies within the fruit that is the thing of real value — like the message of the story passed on by appreciating a piece of fruit's succulent flesh.
Beautifully illustrated, *The Onion* has been presented by The Idries Shah Foundation as a cornerstone in an important charitable and cultural project. This series of illustrated children's books has been made available in the West, with all proceeds from the sales going to provide free editions of the same books for children in Afghanistan.
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THE ONION IDRIES SHAH
The Onion
IDRIES SHAH
Illustrated by Daby Zainab Faidhi

The Onion

CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY IDRIES SHAH

Speak First and Lose
The Ants and the Pen
The Tale of the Sands
After a Swim
The Man, the Tree and the Wolf
The Horrible Dib Dib
The Fisherman's Neighbour
The Magic Potion of Oinkink
The Rich Man and the Monkey
The Boy With No Voice and the Men Who Couldn't Hear
The Tale of Melon City

Dedicated to the sense of imagination which lives within us all.

There was once a time and a town in which onions were rare, almost unknown.

Then one day, a traveller dropped a large onion in the town's main square.

The citizens, or many of them, were very interested in this curious new object.

They could see that it was some kind of vegetable.
But they wanted to know more.

By chance, the first person to venture near the onion coughed, as he approached.

He immediately ran away to teach that 'onions cause coughs'.

The second person to inch near the onion found that it had a strong smell.

'If the outside is as strong as this, then the inside must be almost impossible to bear,' he wept.

So he left the onion alone.

The third man to come close was braver, making a cut in the onion.

A layer of it came off in his hand.

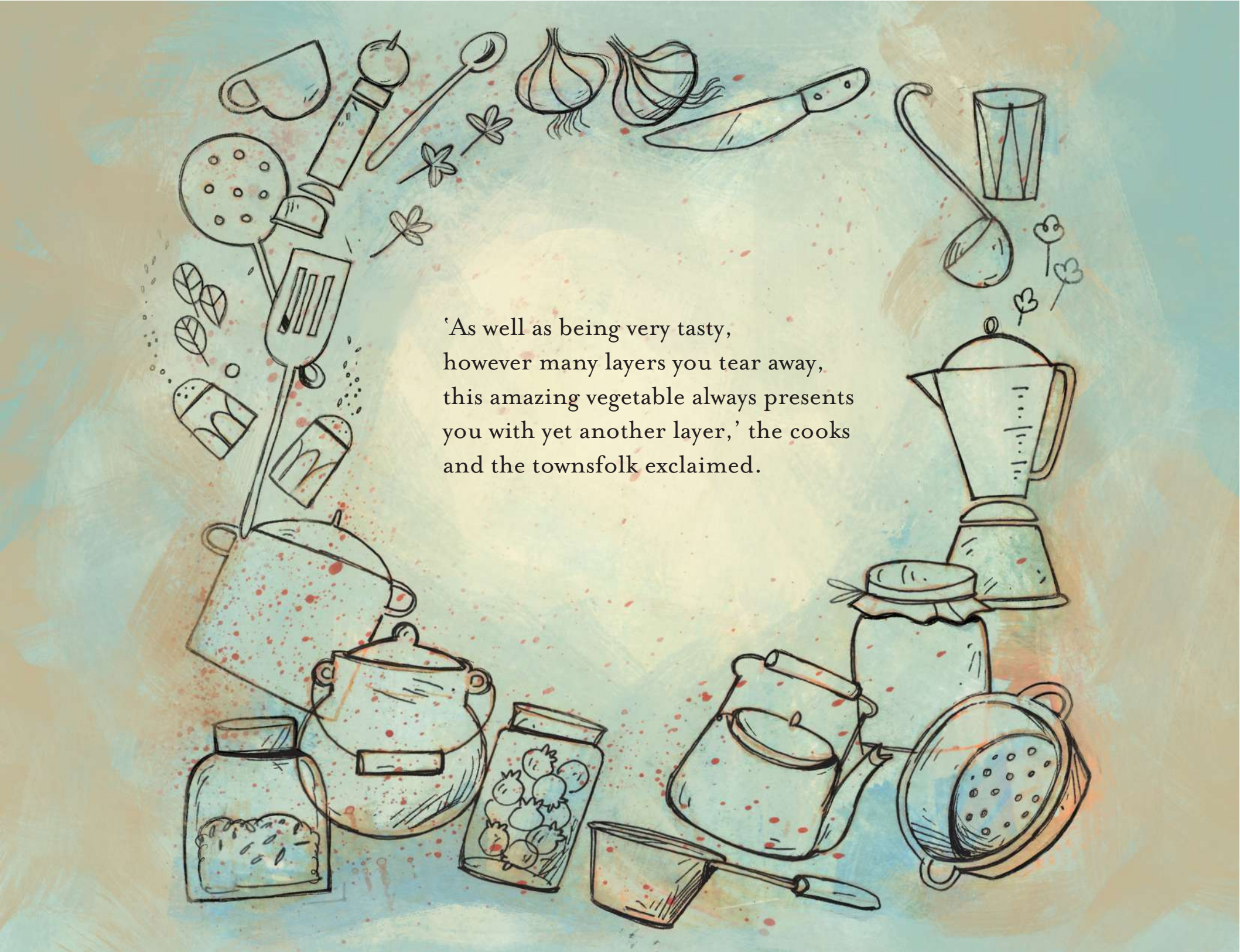
'What a miraculous object!' he cried to the crowd.

'This object has magical qualities. You cut it and it discards the whole of its outside, leaving an inside which is just the same!'

The next person who was brave enough to handle the onion stripped off its outer layer.

And tried cooking some of it.

She realised that cooked onion was delicious, when treated correctly.

In fact, cooked onion was so delicious that she made quite a name for herself, teaching others to recreate the dish.

'As well as being very tasty, however many layers you tear away, this amazing vegetable always presents you with yet another layer,' the cooks and the townsfolk exclaimed.

'It seems to be getting smaller.'
Someone remarked.

'Nonsense!' cried the cooks and the townsfolk.
'That's just an optical illusion.'

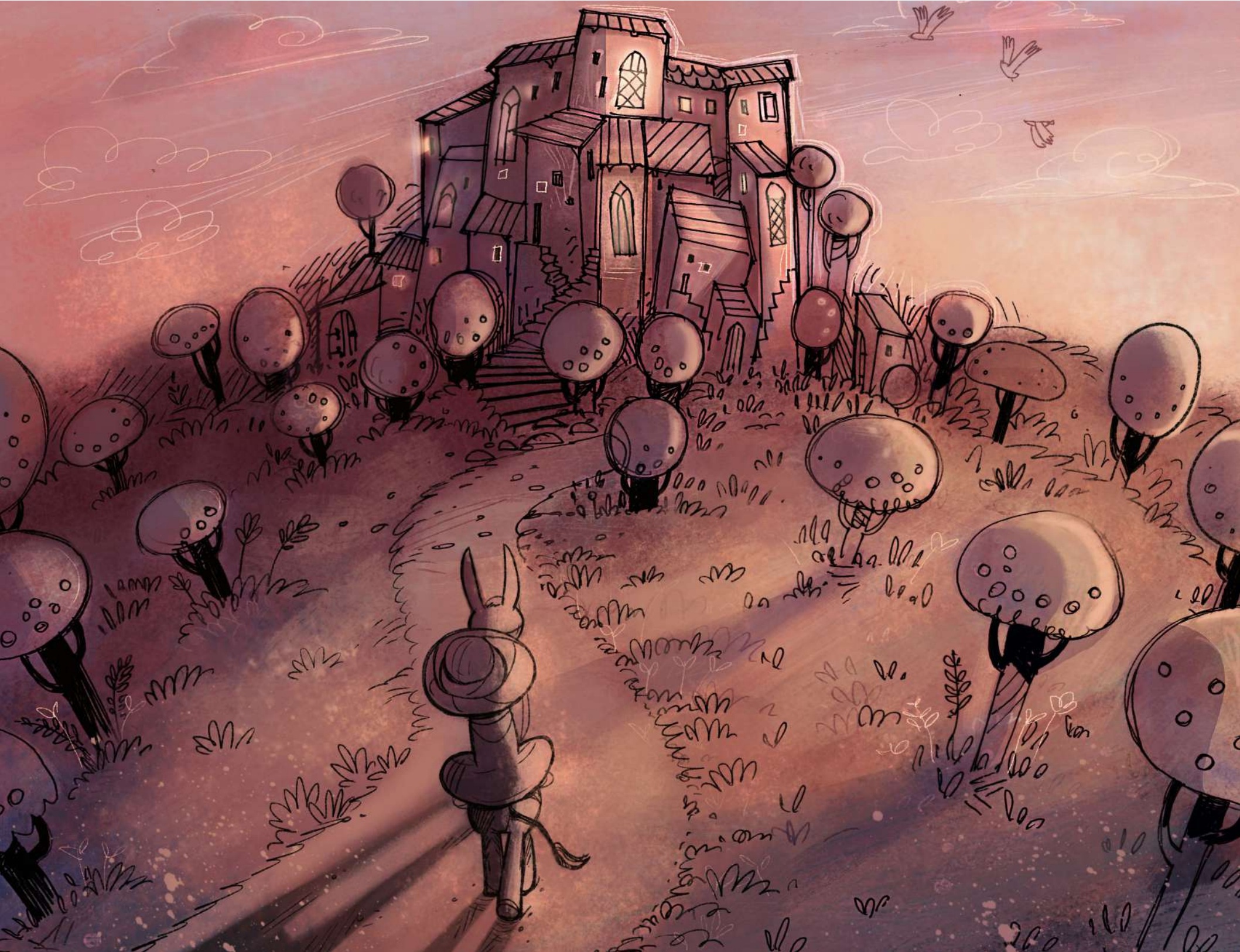
You see, they all wanted to believe that the onion was everlasting.
And when the last layer had been ripped from the onion …

… everyone exclaimed:
'It is undoubtedly a magical but yet a treacherous thing.'

And wiping their hands free from onion juice, they all agreed …

… as indeed was the most sensible thing to do …

… that people were better off …

… on balance …

… in a town without any onions at all.

The End